

Longevity Family Firm and Innovation: a matter of communication?

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Sommario

Gli studi sulle imprese longeve e sull'innovazione sono limitati. Questo studio si propone di scoprire se e come le imprese familiari longeve sono in grado di comunicare l'innovazione e in grado di comunicare l'innovazione rispetto al loro essere tradizionali. Le nostre evidenze individuano come queste aziende adottano un approccio integrativo all'innovazione e la famiglia rimane più legata a temi della tradizione e della loro storia familiare, ma con un ruolo diverso e specifico nel rispetto delle peculiarità della singola impresa.

Parole chiave: Imprese longeve, Imprese familiari, Innovazione, Tradizione, Comunicazione strategica, Continuità aziendale

Abstract

Studies on longevity firms and innovation are limited. This study aims to discover if and how the longevity family firms are able to communicate innovation and able to communicate innovation concerning their being traditional. Our evidence individuated as longevity family firms adopt an integrative approach to innovation and the family remains more attached to tradition with a different role in the firms communication.

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1. Introduction

The enterprise as a viable system is called upon to survive and this is not possible if not adapting. In family firms this can happen with peaceful and balanced generational transitions or with tensions and struggles, periodic pruning of the family tree (Lambrecht, J., and Lievens, J., 2008), or profound restructuring of the entire ownership structure. Some businesses, however, seem to have found the elixir of life, persisting with success for centuries and in the face of changes and crises that are not unlike those of today: pandemics, famine, and conflicts. If apparently, such longevity could attract the attention of scholars, in reality, it was not so for a long time, and still today the studies on the subject of business longevity, with particular attention to family-run businesses, are numerous but not abundant, with gaps on several levels still to be filled, from the management of control governance and succession (Mitchell *et al.*, 2009), to the relationship between employees and family members (Woodfield *et al.*, 2021), to the links that family businesses have with the various stakeholders and with their territory which, for many of the longest-lived businesses, has constituted their purest wealth (Martinez-Sanchis *et al.*, 2022).

For companies to survive is not as easy as it used to be (Perez Fernandez and Raposo, 2007), in addition to the now complete globalization, the constant technological advances and the speed in the dissemination of information make it even more difficult to be able to continue to compete over time (Della Corte, 2013). Due to pandemic, in the last biennium family firms, despite a quiet optimism, in general, see a contraction in revenue. A KPMG study on 2.493 family firms in 75 countries refers that almost 69% in the world see a reduction, a negative impact that translates into cost-cutting measures and in a renegotiation of contracts in the second phase of the pandemic, a 76% access government support and about the 12% was forced to close business either permanently or temporary (TEP Project Global Consortium and KPMG Private Enterprise Global family business report: COVID-19 edition, 2021). If the survival rate to pandemic is not already predictable, due to the current situation so as the debt commitment for some family firms, the pandemic evidence the lack and gap where family firms need to prioritize for the next two years: expanding markets and clients; improving digital capabilities; introducing new

products and/or services, increasing use of new technologies; rethink or adapt their business model (From trust to impact, PWC, 2021).

Today, the challenges for firms are more due to globalization and digitalization, but the objective is always one: continuity, survive and doing in the best way possible. But innovation is not an easy process and family firms are worried about innovation and technology (80%) but the 57% would invest in it (From trust to impact, PWC, 2021). The role of the family in guiding the firms in this fight to survive is fundamental to guaranteed survival over the centuries. If family firms have been investigated differently, however, it still demonstrates there are opportunities for other analyses and even more, as emerges from the analysis of the current literature, the application of the innovation's topic covers a truly marginal part of the studies present with recent attention only in recent years (Ahmad *et al.*, 2020) even more so for centenary companies is that of innovation.

According with the literature, innovation and how innovate, for companies is a matter of life or death (Bessant, 2019). Innovate enforce resilience, even more in the face of the challenges and opportunities opened up by covid-19 (Soluk *et al.*, 2021). The pandemic has raised new research questions: how and where these innovations have occurred (e.g., what level, sector), how and if they will be able to guarantee a competitive advantage even after the pandemic period (Shaker, 2021).

Studies on how long-lived family businesses are able to communicate innovation concerning their being traditional are even more limited. The goodness of this communication could be one of the ingredients of the long-life elixir. Thus, with the intention of contributing to the present theory on family firm innovation and tradition, so to enrich the knowledge on longevity family firms arise the follow research question: *how do centenary family businesses communicate innovation concerning their being traditional?*

In answering this question, it is used the methodology of the case studies presented in the third paragraph that follow the second in which was defined the theoretical background. The case study methodology is the most useful for understanding how these businesses communicate and thus answer the research question. Four long-lived companies in the textile sector associated with the Henokiens were selected but based on the selection criteria chosen, it could be possible to conduct the analysis of only two firms, the reasons are described in the fourth dedicated paragraph. The contribution aims to offer interesting practical and theoretical evaluations. As emerged from the analysis, exposed in the fifth paragraph dedicated to the discussion, the communication strategy in terms of innovation &

tradition most adopted by centenary companies is guided by adopting an approach of integrating tradition rather than segregation. Companies active on the market, respectful of their past, but that want to innovate will be able to consider adopting similar approach. These reflections on tradition and its relationship with the communication strategies of innovation broaden the knowledge on both associated fields.

2. Theoretical background on innovation and tradition

Innovation is a balance between tradition and renovation (Tàpies and Moya, 2012) if it is sure that firms need to innovate to remain strong and not lose their competitive advantage being able to balance these two thrusts is not at all easy. Contrary to what Tàpies and Moya, (2012) affirm, in literature, tradition and innovation have often been seen as opposites (Shoham, 2011) where the creative process requires the destruction of the past and habits. The two thrusts, preserving and modifying, are forced to collide so much that their coexistence is perceived as a paradox, where tradition cannot exist if there is innovation, change, and the past must give way to the future. Being able to manage and understand when to innovate and when to stay true to one's heritage is vital to avoid falling into decision-making paralysis (Ingram *et al.* 2016). Yet, the two thrusts feed themselves and as recognized in De Massis *et al.* (2016) and we can speak both of «innovation through tradition» and also, reversing the order, of «tradition through innovation» (Erdogan *et al.*, 2020, p.46). Innovation and tradition relate in a symbiotic way (Erdogan *et al.*, 2020), and through this coexistence, certainly not always easy but necessary, the company renews itself and seeks that resilience without which it cannot survive. Innovating and staying connected to the past is even more important for centenary companies although there are few studies to date.

Communication together with corporate behaviors and symbolism, is a defined expression of how companies manifest their identity to different stakeholders (Leuthesser and Kohli, 1997, Van Riel and Balmer, 1997), if behaviors and symbolisms are more difficult to identify and analyze, this is less valid for communication. As noted by Vangelisti (2004) it is through communication that families create mental models of family life and it is always through the act of communication that these models persist across generations, it is by understanding these models that it may be possible to better understand family businesses and their consistency over time. Studies on the communication of family firms have focused on communication on the identity and brand of the family firms (Botero *et al.* 2013, Craig *et al.*

2008, Dos Santos *et al.*, 2020, Nordqvist, 2005), on which characteristics of family firms, as dimension and income, could influence the way they communicate (Chen *et al.*, 2019), other studies focused on how family businesses communicate on social media (Obermayer *et al.*, 2022, Raman and Menon, 2018). One of the main studies on family business communication in relation to innovation is the study by Sciascia *et al.* (2013). They identify six patterns determined by orientation to either conversation or communication compliance in family businesses. However, the researchers do not investigate the role of family tradition. Micelotta and Raynard's (2011) studied the online communication of the oldest family business focusing on the different strategies that these companies adopt to communicate their corporate branding strategies. Researchers discover three different variations of communication: family preservation, family enrichment, and family subordination. If scholars have highlighted the importance of innovation and the role that tradition plays in these strategies in various points of the text, they have not investigated the possible relationship that exists between the two dimension. On the latter issue Erdogan *et al.* 2020, in their study of Turkish family businesses, answer the question: «How do family firms manage the paradox between tradition and innovation?» (p. 21). They found two approaches with which a company can react to innovation (Integration or Segregation) and similarly two approaches with which to manage tradition (Preservation or Revival). Considering present and absent studies, it is investigated if a macro-general approach to communication of innovation and tradition is adopted by longevity family firms. In doing this, the research question previously expressed was asked: how centenary family businesses communicate innovation concerning their being traditional. So far research has not considered how family firms communicate innovation to their consumers and none on centenary family firms. In answering this question, we started from the previous research question, as highlighted in the literature, family firms are very interested in communicating the involvement and legacy of the family both with analogic than with digital channels. These communications are also functional to communicate not only the legacy, but also to “craft mentality” (Hennart *et al.*, 2019) and quality (Ciravegna *et al.*, 2020, Pecot and Merchant, 2022).

3. Methodology

To answer our research question, we consider a qualitative approach as the most appropriate. We decide to conduct a multiple case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003), this methodology is valid to apply to the

studies of management because as referred by the Industrial Marketing Management it permits to «*fully adhere to a realistic paradigm and comprehend marketing phenomena*» (Editorial, 2021, 1) and frequently used in the analysis of firms and in particular for family firms (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014) but also fitting with studies that aim to explore the paradox between innovation and tradition (Vrontis *et al.*, 2016). In choosing what were the best firms to indagate we refer to “the Henokiens”, an International Association of bicentenary family companies. The Association, born in 1981, could count on 50 different companies of different sectors all accomuned by longevity, an existence of almost 200 years; and permanence, a member of the family still manages the company or is a member of the board, where the family is the majority of shareholders (Le Henokiens: about). Companies all guided by solidity comes from a different sector, often changed and diversified over the years.

4. Case study selection

Most of the family businesses in their evolution became business families so we decide to indagate longevity family firms where the area of activity is still linked to the business from which they originated, their first entrepreneurial legacy. We decide to confine the analysis to only one sector, we choose the textile industry, the sector in past suffers from different challenges, from outsourcing practices to the arrival of big international companies, and is now attempted not only by low-cost labor but almost two big challenges, a first technological aimed for the new industry 4.0, and a second about sustainability in an industry that only in EU consumption is about from 2% to 10% of the environmental impact (European Parliament Think Tank, 2019). Hence, innovation in process, infrastructure, and mindsets is needed (Huang *et al.*, 2021). The textile industry globally suffers from slight contraction due to covid-19, but recovery and growth are already started and are coming to a pre-pandemic level (Euratext - European Apparel and Textile Confederation).

The family firms born and still active in the textile industry as their core business in The Henokiens are four: Vitale Barberis Canonico VBC -1663; Nakagawa Masashichi Shoten -1716; Fratelli Piacenza -1733; Lanificio G.B. Conte -1757. We confined the research to the website, social channels and communications issued by individual family firms, selecting only the channels owned by the chosen companies (Chang *et al.*, 2018), as also done previously in the study by Lock and Arujo (2020) confined to visual analysis, allows to stay focused on the company itself and thus better grasp

the communication strategies and themes they want to communicate. From an initial review of these channels, it was deemed necessary to remove the company Lanificio G.B Conte and Nakagawa Masashichi Shoten from the investigation. The first, Lanificio G. B. Conte, was acquired in recent years by Marzotto Spa and no longer communicates, rather it is communicated from time to time through the channels of the purchasing company. The second, although born as a textile company, is now more linked to the theme of the craftman and communication on these channels confirms this. The not full relevance to the textile sector and its logic, seasonality of the collections and different production models, led to its exclusion from the sample. The analysis of the site was conducted by investigating both its structure and the contents present, during the analysis particular attention was paid to analysing the presence or absence of contents that refer to the concept of Innovation, the concept of Tradition and Heritage, and then to their symbiosis. In the analysis of social media, we took as reference the time span from 01/09/2019 to 22/04/2022, a time horizon allows us to grasp the main contemporary innovations that have recently influenced the entire sector and collect data on 6 different fashion seasons.

It was decided to focus on a single Instagram channel, since from the analysis of Facebook it emerged that the posts published are mostly the same for both social networks, thus avoiding unnecessary duplication we have only selected Instagram. For the selection of the data we used a web scraping software, once the different posts were identified we proceeded to first manual coding and then to coding via MAXQDA software (Bazeley, 2006) identifying the key variables of this study: Innovation - Tradition - Innovation & Tradition; we decided to add variables that emerged from the initial analysis most relevant for the individual brands and by inserting a variable that concerns the “Fabrics” typical for this sector, from fabrics to yarns to the complete collections, and specific code regard the firms analyzed: Journey for Piacenza Cashemere and Internationality for VBC. The code tree is present in appendix 1. In the next paragraph, we aim to discuss the results of the analysis of the single cases selected.

5. Discussion

5.1 Case study 1: The Vitale Barberis Canonico

Italy is well noted for its attitude toward fashion and the textile industry plays a key role in the economy, for Cassa Depositi e Prestiti the fashion supply is the 8,5% of the turnover in Italy’s manufacturing sector. Twenty

centuries, as long as the Biella's tradition in the textile industry, the city is also noted as the "wool city". Vitale Barberis Canonico is the most ancient family. Over 350 years of activity have been able to manage all stages of wool processing. A success exported in 100 countries that absorb more than 80% of their production and built not only on a strict selection of the wool but also on technology adaptation and innovation using highly innovative machinery and technology, new fabrics in natural and innovative blends without, as mentioned on The Henokiens family profile, elegance, and quality. Today the company has more than 400 employees, 40 agents globally, and a revenue of 87,9 million euros (2020) in line with the industry slightly down due to covid-19. Surviving toward industrial revolution and two worlds war the company go public in 1970. The two brothers Alberto and Luciano perfectly balanced and coordinated. Alberto manages the technical and technological side and recently signed a contract with Comau (Stellantis group) and Iuvo (Sant 'Anna University's Spinoff) introducing wearable exoskeletons, devices that support operators in handling and lifting loads, relieving their impact on joints and muscles. Luciano, on the export side, is involved in conquering export markets. Both defend and make big the prestigious family firm. With the aim to answer our research question, we start analyzing the website and social media channels.

The family's website is very traditional and in line with the brand's slogan: "*The Italian Fabric of elegance since 1663*". The name of the family and the company stands out at the top, like a banner, under which the year of foundation, 1663, is shown. The site is available in several languages: Italian, English, French, Japanese, Chinese and Korean. In the opening, the protagonists are the fabrics produced with the detail of the family name. The short video with the production of fabrics tells of fabrics designed with passion, masterly woven, where therefore it is the know-how, "*heritage and utmost quality*" that guides the company. The social media profile of the brand is on Instagram and Facebook, as explained in the methodology section we study only Instagram. As for the VBC Instagram channel, it has a total of 97.3 thousand followers and 176 followed profiles, the caption of the profile is the same as the website "*The Italian fabric of elegance since 1663*" thus highlighting its longevity, making clear reference to made in Italy and plays with the word "fabric" of elegance. The Facebook profile, on the other hand, can count on 151,335 "likes" and 153,224 "followers".

Proceeding with the results Innovation in VBC is not communicated as much as in reality the company could and so also the role of the family is woven more to heritage and tradition than to innovation. Innovation

remains almost an element taken for granted, innovating is normal in order to continue to guarantee quality products, consequently, an integrated approach to innovation is adopted. The research shows that unlike other companies in the VBC sector, it communicates both product innovations and process innovations adopted. However, innovation and creativity remain largely communicated on the occasion of new collections or important events. Indicative as the term “innovation” appears rarely and more frequently is the term of rediscovery, interpretation. Thus, innovation is the result of a “*dedication of the Company to protecting humans and nature*”. It is the “news” section of the site that more than all the other channels offer the best overview of the recent innovations and changes introduced by the company, from exoskeletons to environmental protection and enhancement, as their renewed first interest in the hydroelectric plants of Alto Adige, from which they purchase green energy which has allowed them to have almost 100% renewable electricity and certifications. An innovation which, as confirmed by the company itself, does not end with the introduction of a new process, machinery, or fabric, but becomes a choice, a commitment to continue to innovate this element over time and thus dynamically adapt to changes in the sector and to new discoveries:

“...the crystal clear water of our valleys. We use this precious water with greatest attention and respect: we purify 100% of our water waste by means of an in-house waste treatment plant built in 1987 and which is constantly updated”.

In the case of VBC, innovation is communicated in union with style elements and at a very technical level, often more suited to experts and great amateurs of the textile and tailoring field than to a wider audience:

“Suggestion #3: Be stylish! VBC combines the look of denim with the soft handle of wool, thanks to a special spray dyeing technique. Vintage reinterprets classics with a touch of creative flair!”

“The quality of our products is the feather in our cap and the result of a virtuous value chain. We select the best natural raw materials and guarantee full traceability along the entire production chain. We proudly keep a vertical production 100% Made in Italy, investing in technology and innovation and stimulating creativity and research. Last but not least, we dedicate an accurate and punctual tailor-made service to our customers”.

“In the Supersonic range, the stretch and resilience of the best wools are optimized by avant-garde production technology to give ideal performance and an impeccable look”.

But quality is also very limited by having to submit to traditional techniques; therefore, this quality can be a double-edged sword that could confine innovation. In addition to quality, the company communicates its innovations in combination with another element, sustainability. The search for sustainable practices both at an environmental, social and ethical level has been pushing the company for some years to draw up social reports, and communicate them but even more to rethink itself. It is no coincidence that there are numerous posts where new innovations are the consequence of having introduced new, more sustainable practices for the environment:

“We are proud to have been able to reduce the noise in our weaving plant from 100 dB to 85 dB by introducing sound-proof cabins”.

Sustainability has an important link with tradition, innovating and being sustainable also means reviving old techniques from the past either because they are more sustainable than the current ones or because they have been reworked to reduce the impact on the environment and society and keep the tradition alive by offering a different product from the others. What emerged from the analysis of the posts is how by interviewing a company employee it would seem that innovation and the company’s ability to innovate is much more communicated internally than externally, involving its employees:

“When I think of Vitale Barberis Canonico, the three words that come to mind are Tradition, Innovation, and Excellence”.

Innovation, the textile tradition of which the company is an expression look to the future:

“Choosing a fabric is the salient moment in the creation of a garment. Doing this with awareness implies both attention and responsibility with regard to the future”.

However, tradition remains much more communicated and remains tied to the node of quality and style - class, whereas for VBC dressing becomes a choice of style and comfort. The recovery of the company’s history and tradition thus becomes an opportunity to tell the story of the company. For example, the museum of fabrics owned by the company becomes an opportunity to leverage the nostalgia of ancient times and an opportunity to narrate some salient passages from the past of the VBC family. Style and tradition are powerful levers that are exploited to communicate above all to different international customers who are involved by reposting the posts they publish citing the company and demonstrating that wearing a VBC

garment remains synonymous with classicism, tradition, and love for the “Italian well dressed”.

The desire to innovate but also to train resources who are aware of the tradition not so much familiar as fabrics and yarns is of primary importance for the company that has been carrying on the tradition of its Training School since the early twentieth century, a school where professional could learn the tailoring art and gets in touch with the company’s centenary know-how and knowledge. Faced with this innovation and tradition, the family and the role it plays in the survival of the company remains linked more to tradition than to innovation and is, therefore, less communicated in the presence of innovations. It remains the guide and the opportunity to make more emotional communications.

In the case of longevity companies, it, therefore, appears interesting how innovation is communicated both in combination with a tradition and without, adopting the approach of communicating either only tradition or only innovation:

“We operate in harmony with the environment and our surroundings. We manage natural resources with great care and attention, aiming at the least environmental impact possible (...). To do so, we apply state-of-the-art technology, constantly revise the infrastructure and production processes”.

“Vitale Barberis Canonico is participating in the event of the 19th Week of Business Culture “The Phoenix Principle” with the podcast “Avere la stoffa” (Having the Stuff) curated by @valedepov and Promemoria Group. “The future is coming and there are many ways of welcoming it. Ever since 1663, the Vitale Barberis Canonico wool mill has approached the future by transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary. The “ordinary” raw material becomes the extraordinary fabric. Weaving has always been a noble activity and continues to develop this vision. The looms work for tomorrow and, tomorrow, there will always be a saia grisa (grey wool) and other perfect fabrics. Old Ajmo, the founder of the company, and all his descendants from the 1600s till the present cannot and will not be anything but proud of this. Click on the link in bio to listen to the podcast”.

“Guided by tradition and made with innovation”.

Unlike other companies, it also innovates in terms of channels, for example, it has created a compilation on Spotify, a Podcast and a series of stories involving the international boutiques with which it collaborates:

“Vitale Barberis Canonico and Man On the Boon presented a collection of garments created by the Korean brand using the mill’s Original Woollen Flannel, Revenge Perennial and Vintage fabrics. These garments, where tradition meets

innovation in the name of classicism, will be available in the Korean brand's stores for Autumn/Winter 2019/2020. #VitalBarberisCanonico #VBCfabrics #ManOnTheBoon #Seoul #OriginalWoollenFlannel #Revenge #Perennial”.

The company appears so innovative and attentive to the present thanks to its know-how from the past that it would sacrifice to ensure the future of the company. VBC is very careful to innovate, they have a lot of opportunities but seem as if there is a lack in the communication strategy. Below is the word cloud that visually summarizes the major words that the company publishes on Instagram (Image 1), frequency and the percentage of codified segment for each firms node are presented in the Appendix 2. As we can read, the company and the brand are central, in accordance with the frequencies observed for the node of the fabrics (the composition: wool, flannel, 21 microns; colors). Interesting, as we will also observe for the second company analysed, is the theme of discovery, that is linked to the imposed need to innovate and think about new collections in the face of the new seasons but preserving elegance and style. Apparently, the theme of tradition and family is less present, but the word “Our”, that is directly linked to the brand, highlights how communication aims to make the customer feel part of it and how much is important the creative process.

Image 1



5.2. Case study 2: Nakagawa Masashichi Shoten

Nakagawa Masashichi Shoten was established in 1716, but probably their origins are in the Kamakura period (1185- 1333). Their history is a story of progress and decline. The business started thanks to the bleaching technique that the family applied to realize samurai and Buddhist priest clothes, but in the 17th century, when the family was designated as suppliers deliver to the government the success began to arrive. But after the growth arrive the decline, with the abolition of the Samurai class, their business suffered a severe halt. This was the condition to *die or alive*, they choose the second so in 1910 they return to being a manufacturing wholesaler and focusing on an urban-based handicraft industry that is till now the core business. After the family moved the production bases overseas, in 1950, is at the beginning of the 2000s that the company began a process of great renewal: shifting from manufacturing wholesale to manufacturing retail, opening local stores. Thus, despite these transformations, Nakagawa Masashichi Shoten is still partially tied up to the textile industry, but the real core business remains the household goods and trade and enhancing Japan's craftsmanship also creating a consulting business dedicated to safeguarding craftsman's products and design. From the first selection and analyzing website and social media and realizing that the craftsman production is prevalent we decide to remove the company for our analysis. From the website, a site but also a real marketplace, emerge as the company is interested in gift - fashion - food – housing confirm also in the themes of the blogs centered on “*comfortable living*”. Social media present are Facebook, Instagram Twitter, and Line, all social media are in Japanese, and as confirmed their claim is: “日本の工芸を元気にする！ - Do energy to Japan craftsman's product!”

5.3. Case study 3: Fratelli Piacenza

As previously written Biella is the wool city and Fratelli Piacenza born near the city, especially in Pollone city. What makes a business flourish also territories and the family firm in its origins obtain from the council of Pollone to use the water of the city due to its finest quality for the processing of the wool. The company was founded in 1733 have the name, not of the city of Piacenza, but its first founder Pietro Francesco Piacenza. In 1800 Piacenza family was the first to introduce a new technique of fashioning wool decorated to exploit the first hydroelectric power plant based on the new turbine of Pierre – Simon Girard. In 1900 they confirm

their technical attention by opening an ultramodern factory in Turin, but not only attention to tech innovation but also for organization and labor, Piacenza family founded *the Biella Industrial Union* and a School specialized in training the personnel. In the last century, the family firm continue their research of innovation introducing new types of textiles to replace wool fabrics, maintaining the attention to quality and selected raw materials where Merino wool comes from Australian farms, the Alpaca wool from Perú, and cashmere from Mongolia. A fine quality that reaches success also internationally: 70% of their production is sold abroad.

Till now the family firm, that is starting to introduce the fourteenth generation in the management, remains loyal to using natural teasel in product manufacturing and guarantees the highest quality. The firms could count on 240 employees and a revenue of 40 million euros, a little contraction due to the restriction of Covid-19. Guido Piacenza, the tenth generation, and now the guide of the firms refers to the secret for the longevity of the firm is in “*a word: tradition*” but “*keeping an eye on change, on innovation not only on the world of their products*”. These words are truly expressed toward the firm’s communication channels? As mentioned, we analyze the site and the social media channel, especially Instagram. On-site, opposite to VBC, there is the possibility to subscribe to the newsletter as the opportunity to access the e-boutique. The main values of the firm are people and then, as proof of how much innovation and tradition are in symbiosis, “*tradition and innovation*” are considered together where glue “*sensitivity*” are followed by the environment, quality again, and the family.

Before presenting the findings of the survey, we present some general information also on the social media profile. The Piacenza Brothers channel is PiacenzaCashmere1733, which currently has 9,948 followers and 1094 following, a good relationship. The channel, open since July 2015, in the description reports: “*Made consciously in Italy since 1733*” thus clearly emerges both the date of foundation, the relationship, and the strength to be able to count on made in Italy. The “made consciously” confirms the attention to tailor-made and to do it with a conscience. The Facebook profile can count on 9,468 “likes” and 9,830 “followers”. The contents published on Facebook are the same as those published on Instagram, the only exception being a more frequent use of Italian and a more in-depth presentation of the company. The following codes emerged from the first coding: Innovation, Tradition, Innovation & Tradition, Fabrics, Style, Quality, Made in Italy, Sustainability, Journey, Family and the presence or absence of an Influencer or the activation of collaborations with other brands or tailors.

In the case of Piacenza Cashmere, innovation is communicated above all at the product level and new collections rather than to the family, an element already noted for VBC, and as the latter adopts an approach of integration to innovation rather than segregation.

The family remains more connected to heritage and tradition but in opposite to VBC appears to be more active in communicating in the first person and in name of the company also in both channels. The communication of innovation almost seems to happen in combination with the style and class of the fabrics and trying to keep them always “*timeless*” and as *must-have*. Seasonality and new lifestyles impose the need to constantly retransform, rework, innovate, combine and experiment with different fibers to meet the needs dictated by fashion:

“Resourcefulness and determination, curiosity and courage are the key values around which the Fall/Winter 22-23 Collection unfolds; inevitably guided by heritage, research and innovation.

Timeless classics reinterpreted with an elegant, relaxed and modern attitude”.

The great interest in offering high quality products more than innovative is in the frequent posts that show the exact percentage of the different wools used in making fine quality fabrics:

“Spring Summer Jacket Silk And Cashmere Collection Ultra-fine cashmere and silk fabrics for a refined bespoke herringbone jacket to wear in a spring day in Venice, in the stunning San Marco square. gr.,200 - 92% Cashmere 8% Silk #NewFabricsCollection #Bespoke.

In this process the Heritage remains as a guide and know-how that confirms the quality of the consumer choice that as mentioned on the site quality is “*an obsession*”:

“The world of knitwear is reinterpreted with heritage and rethought for the future. Explore the ultra - soft touches of #PiacenzaCashmere1733”.

“Resourcefulness and determination, curiosity and courage are the key values around which the Fall/Winter 22-23 Collection unfolds; inevitably guided by heritage, research and innovation. Timeless classics reinterpreted with an elegant, relaxed and modern attitude”.

“Guided by tradition and made with innovation. # Piacenza Cashmere1733” .

The different collections almost force the company to innovate and keep up with the fashion and society dressed by the Family firm products.

However, innovation remains less communicated than the classicism and tradition of the company. Collaborations and the use of influencers are reduced for Piacenza Family in confront to VBC. Collaborations and influencers are not used to communicate innovativeness, but as a reconfirmation of the timelessness of the brand and to make use of the refinement of “Made in Italy”, in fact, collaborations with historical brands prefer historical Italian brands such as Leone candies, the Fila sportswear b or the amaro Fernet Branca:

“Tour and taste the cultural legacy. The latest #PiacenzaExperience takes the brand’s special guests on a journey of the Italian senses beyond style territory at @ FernetBranca’s #BrancaMuseum. Exploring the legendary distillery together with discovering # PiacenzaCashmere1733’s latest essence in reinterpreting the family’s renowned garment making from an unconventional perspective. #BrancaDistillerie”.

Peculiarity and interesting choice to communicate both the company and the role of the family for the company is the metaphor of the “Journey”. The code is confined to the communication of the Piacenza Family. It tells the journey of the fourteenth generation at the helm of the group. Like their first descendants, they go to the places from which the wool that the company then processes come from, from lamas to vicuna so that, in time, the journey of the family becomes the journey of the wool itself and a now an infinite journey in search of quality in “*ancestral legacy*” but also “*a way to discover*” of the family:

“The Piacenza family has been nurturing across generations towards the search for the finest wools”.

Even for Piacenza cashmere, although communicated differently, sustainability is a very important element, since the best products can only be created from the best raw materials. If sustainability becomes an opportunity to renew not only one’s products by providing eco-friendly fabrics, but also an opportunity to rethink internal processes. Sustainability is communicated in a different way to VBC both on the website and on the social channels. In the case of Piacenza Cashmere, sustainability has a much stronger link with tradition and preservation:

“Always attentive to its tradition, combined with contemporaneity and innovation, the selection of strictly natural raw materials and the use of eco-friendly production processes to conjure the new season’s remarkable style for modern men who seek for extraordinary fineness. Discover#Piacenza Cashmere 1733 Spring Summer 2020 Collection via link in bio. #MadeInItaly”.

The growing interest in sustainability is reconfirmed also in the second section of the website and for the family is “*What we call environmental sustainability today is what we once called the feeling of being at one with nature*”. Sustainability also becomes a priority over innovation and to analyzed in future research.

Below is the word cloud that visually summarizes the major words that the company publishes on Instagram (image 2). How could it read, everything revolves around the collections that the company creates and is called to periodically present for the spring summer and autumn winter seasons. These occasions become an opportunity and obligation to rethink and so “discover” that as previously mentioned is a guide theme common from both the firms analysed. In accordance with what has been noted in terms of node frequency, in appendix 2, the fabrics and style, devoted to elegance, made in Italy and timelessness, remain the main nodes. Family, heritage and attention to generations find a strong connection, while tradition remains more linked to the “collection”. As we can read, the future and being new are very strongly connected to this last theme. This closeness reconfirms and answers our demand that longer-lived family businesses adopt an approach of integrating tradition in their communication of innovation. The two concepts are communicated by leveraging the identity elements that are the strengths of the company.

Image 2



5.4. Case study 4: Lanificio G.B. Conte

The Family Conte founded the homonymous company in 1757. The family has been able to lead the company for over 250 years and till now is one of the best known and most advanced in the processing of wool in Italy. The company achieved success not only with the industrial revolution but also from the union of the Veneto with the Kingdom of Italy. The family always tried to remain innovative and was one of the first firms to introduce electricity. It is with “*Alvise’s Reign*” that the company found its great success. The case is a case in itself. In 2008 Lanificio G.B. Conte has become a division of the Marzotto Group. Searching online it was found a space on the Marzotto group site, divided into three different sections: “Collections” - “Research and development” - “Contacts”.

In the collections, the link with tradition remains strong and the historical and centenary origins are enhanced, but the family entrepreneurship of the Conte disappears. Reference is made to both historical *savoir-faire* and “*constantly updated proposals, renewed and aligned with the most current moods, while maintaining its sophisticated identity*” (site). The brand and is subject to management and coordination by Marzotto Spa and it has no social channels so we could go more in deep with the analysis.

6. Conclusion

The study carried out has several implications. First evidence confirms that for companies active in the textile sector and even more in the fashion sector, innovation and creativity are necessary and forced by having new collections for the different seasons. However, these are mostly cases of marginal innovations than disruptive or incremental, these reinterpretations, as emerged, are communicated in an active way and adopting time to time different approaches to communicate innovation or the link with tradition.

For Centenary family-run companies, communication is essential, both internally to strengthen and share the company’s mission and vision, but also externally with the various stakeholders to confirm their quality and their always being in step with times and with the needs of their customers. These firms tend to communicate more product innovations than process or organizational innovations, future studies could validate whether incremental or disruptive ones are better communicated to different stakeholders, in particular employees, suppliers, and other partners and as these communications could impact the family, the company and its external perception. By expanding the knowledge on longevity family firms and integrating the studies on the communication’s strategy about innovation of family firms considering the not investigated concept of tradition and how it is communicated with

respect to innovation, it has been identified as, longevity family firms have a tendency to communicate tradition and innovation with an approach of “integration”, aimed at maintaining the essence of the legacy or restoring the legacy (Erdogan *et al.*, 2020). A further implication, due to the analysis of more than two and a half years of publications on social media, is that family businesses, although they follow a general strategy, it is not excluded that in the tradition-innovation relationship, in particular cases, events or occasions, these firms adjust their strategy’s approach without losing consistency. Future research can thus investigate what motivates this adoption and in front of what elements they choose to adopt one or when they consider other approach: there are different examinations and debate, or it happens in a “spontaneous” way, this is the result of that entrepreneurial legacy that is handed down and to which generations are educated, this could be interesting questions. Being able to maintain the link between innovation and the past is not easy, even more so for longevity companies that often indulge in traditionalist communication rather than innovation, this can be seen both at the level of communication channels and at the product level. The extreme knowledge of the business in which they operate has allowed centenarian family firms to remain resilient; however, today, in the face of contemporary challenges, being able to remain innovative, not to become or appear “dated” more than longevity are important challenges that longevity family firms are aware to deal.

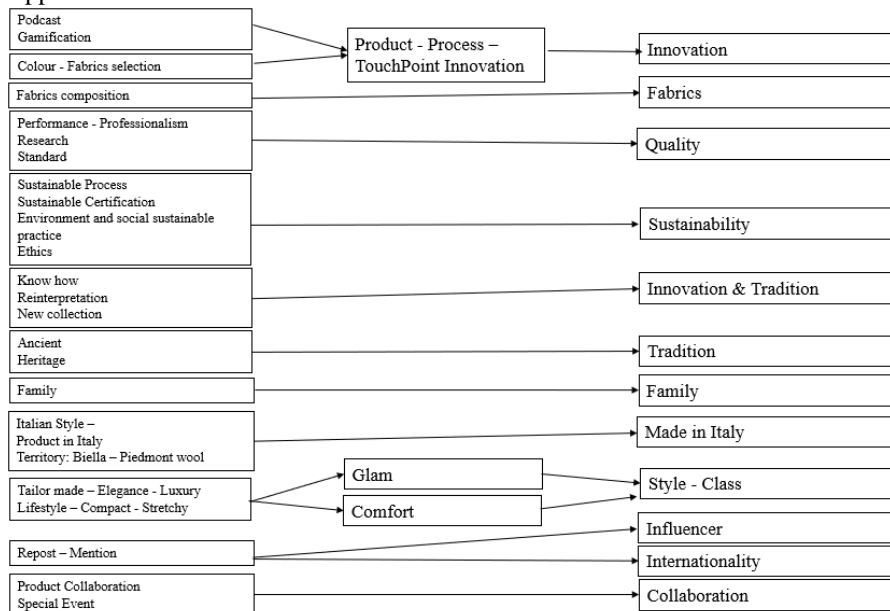
At a managerial level, it is therefore important that the digital presence is strengthened, for example by inserting the sales channel directly on the website; the links with the various stakeholders have to be strengthened or by leveraging collaborations with companies similar for business but more into the mindset, so in exploiting active international relationships to create new opportunities for innovation or expansion of the customer base. Many century family firms become custodians not only of a family inheritance but often custodians and testimony of the evolution of entire sectors. This is an opportunity, but also a potential risk of resistance to change. At the managerial level, their passion and know-how of their products have to be managed carefully because the risk is to communicate more about the sector than the company and their products, all these themes could be used for communication more educational so to educate their clients which will choose the products could confirm their quality choice. Longevity family firms do not communicate themselves very often and when they do, this communication remains very linked to the business, on a particular occasion and with a more emotional tone, and where the legacy is a guarantee for the innovations they implement. Unlike other research, it emerges that these firms tend to communicate above all their contemporaneity, their attempt to be *timeless*. At a managerial level, it is important to maintain a coherent communication

strategy, aimed at strengthening the consistency and continuity of the family firms as well as the product level, it is preferable to adopt an approach aimed at integrating innovation rather than segregating it.

At a family level, if communicating tradition and the link with the past remain a *must-have*, introducing and letting communicate new generations allow family businesses to strengthen ties, modernize and develop profiles.

An emergent theme to study in future is how sustainability practice and how this theme could guide the innovation as succession is recommended (Esposito and Mirone, 2019). The main limitations of this study consist in having confined the research to a single sector. Future research could make comparisons with other long-lived companies in different sectors or investigate the difference in communicating the traditional nature between business family and family business, two configurations present among the members of the “Henokiens”, in this case, the communication strategies could differ a lot and even more, the communication of the family and of the tradition could be even less present or delegated to specific channels such as the website of the group, of the holding company or the family foundation. Future investigations could investigate whether in practice the different approaches and strategies to tradition and innovation adopted are able to communicate, if a timeless mentality and a process of continuous discovery, are also valid for non-family firms and even more so for longevity non-family firms.

Appendix 1 – Code Tree



Appendix 2 – Occurrences for category and percentage of codified segment

Vitale Barberis Canonico		
Code	Occurrence's for category	Percentage of codified segment
Collaboration	39	7%
Fabrics	67	12%
Family	21	3,7%
Influencer	30	5%
Innovation	24	4,3%
Innovation and Tradition	54	10%
Internationality	33	6%
Made in Italy	21	4%
Quality	63	12%
Style - Class	86	20%
- Comfort	19	
- Glam	8	
Sustainability	36	7%
Tradition	55	9%

Piacenza Cashmere		
Code	Occurrence's for category	Percentage of codified segment
Collaboration	22	4,6%
Fabrics	67	14%
Family	21	4,5%
Influencer	2	0,3%
Innovation	15	4%
Innovation and Tradition	41	8,5%
Journey	29	6%
Made in Italy	20	4%
Quality	71	15%
Style - Class	99	20%
Sustainability	48	10%
Tradition	44	9%

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